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SUBJECT: ANOTHER STEP ALONG A ROCKY ROAD: BELGIAN MINISTERS VISIT  
DRC

¶1. (SBU/NF) Summary: Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht's meetings with President Kabila April 20-21 in Kinshasa aggravated pre-existing bilateral tensions on both sides. Belgian Ministers of Defense and International Cooperation accompanied De Gucht during his April 20-26 visit to the DRC. The Belgians also met with port officials in Bas-Congo, authorities in Lubumbashi, Amani Process officials in North Kivu, and international and local NGO's in Goma and Bukavu. At an April 28 breakfast with Western ambassadors the Belgians were critical of Congolese Defense Minister Chihez and called for greater cooperation between donors. Chihez later told us the Belgians, particularly De Gucht, had treated Kabila in ways unbecoming a sovereign head of state and had even criticized the President in front of his advisors. Bilateral relations between Belgium and the DRC, never smooth, continue to be prickly and impact upon the DRC's interactions with other European nations. End summary.

¶2. (SBU/NF) Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, accompanied by Defense Minister Pieter de Crem and International Cooperation Minister Charles Michel, emphasized good governance, human rights, corruption and transparency during his April 20-26 visit to the DRC. DeGucht's message was not welcomed by President Kabila, who publicly questioned Belgium's commitment to good bilateral relations. The three Belgian ministers expressed concern over lack of progress on these issues to Kabila in meetings on April 21 and ¶22. Kabila bristled at their message and tone. His statement to a Belgian newspaper that "Belgium must decide whether it wants normal ties or seeks a master-slave relationship" received wide play here. A Belgian Embassy political officer told us the meetings with Kabila were tense and confirmed the accuracy of the quote.

¶3. (SBU/NF) The ministers discussed economic investment and cooperation with Matadi and Boma port officials April 22. De Crem also met with Defense Minister Chihez Diemu to follow up meetings in Brussels on military assistance (see para 6). Although MONUC's Radio Okapi reported the signing of a new bilateral agreement, the Belgian political officer said this had not happened. De Gucht and Michel discussed mining issues with Katanga Governor Moise Katumbi in Lubumbashi on April 23 while De Crem returned to Belgium. They also visited two mining projects. They concluded no new agreements or investments.

¶4. (SBU) De Gucht and Michel traveled to eastern DRC April 24 for a two-day visit to Goma and Bukavu to demonstrate support for the Goma and Nairobi processes and call attention to weaknesses of the justice sector, the prevalence of impunity and the problem of sexual violence. They discussed the Amani Program with National Coordinator Apollinaire Malu Malu in Goma and accompanied him and members of the Joint Technical Committee on Peace and Security on public awareness missions to Masisi and Uvira.

¶15. (SBU/NF) The Belgian Consul General (protect) in Bukavu told us they also met with representatives of the EU-funded Restoration of Justice in the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo (REJUSCO) program, Avocats Sans Frontieres, and MONUC-Goma's Human Rights section to review the state of the justice system, and specifically address the progress in establishing mobile courts. They discussed the widespread problem of sexual violence against women with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and local and international NGOs in Goma and Bukavu.

¶16. (SBU/NF) On April 28 the ministers met with ambassadors resident in Kinshasa from the EU and the United States. Cooperation minister Michel took the lead, explaining that Belgium wants the Congolese to treat the Chinese the way they treat other donors, i.e., to require transparency, conditionalities, etc. He also called for greater coordination between the donor community, including regular systematic reviews of what all countries are doing in order to avoid duplication, etc. Defense minister De Crem was critical of his counterpart Chikez, referring to an earlier meeting with Chikez in which the Congolese officially allegedly made request for assistance in areas that are not related to the military. (Note: Chikez later told us the Belgians, particularly De Gucht, had treated Kabila in ways unbecoming a sovereign head of state and had even criticized the President in front of his advisors. End note.)

¶17. (SBU/NF) Comment: Belgian-DRC relations, never smooth, continue to be conflicted. Senior Belgian officials visit the Congo frequently, raising important issues like human rights, justice and corruption, but in a manner that appears pitched more to audiences back home than to their Congolese counterparts. This hobbles the relationship with Kabila and his advisers and often spills over onto a wider stage, impacting negatively on DRC relations with other

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European nations. End comment.

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